

PRESIDENT W.H. BUSH, MASCULINITY, AND AMERICA'S INVASION OF PANAMA CITY IN 1989

by Maureen Mahoney

*[Ezra] Pound is right, Erik said. Look into your history. Here we are. Mama has been kissed good-bye, we've grabbed our rifles, we're ready for war. All this not because of conviction, not for ideology; rather it's from fear of society's censure, just as Pound claims. Fear of weakness. Fear that to avoid war is to avoid manhood. We come to Fort Lewis afraid to admit we are not Achilles, that we are not brave, not heroes. Here we are, thrust to the opposite and absurd antipode of what we think is good. And tomorrow we'll be out of bed at three o'clock in the pitch-black morning.*¹

To varying degrees, Americans throughout the twentieth century have believed that a masculine nature was required to wield political authority.² Similar to the attitudes Tim O'Brien expresses through Erik's character, this nature can be based on forceful and martial traits. Historians have shown how such perceptions of masculinity have influenced past presidents' foreign policies. Kristin Hoganson, for instance, argues that at the turn of the century, most Americans felt that their political system depended on the "rougher, manlier virtues... [of] the soldier." In focusing on the pressure from such politicians as Theodore Roosevelt, who firmly believed in associations between these virtues and political leadership, Hoganson reveals how social convictions of masculinity shaped President William McKinley's decisions to declare war on Spain, annex Hawaii, and colonize the Philippines.³

However, a society's perception of masculinity is not definite; it can be interpreted and lived differently. Instead of focusing on strength and aggression, portions of the American population have venerated co-operation and compromise. This is particularly true within a familial context.⁴ This article explores how a president's embodiment of a masculinity based on conciliation affects their legitimacy. During the 1988 presidential campaign, certain members of the media nicknamed candidate George H.W. Bush a "wimp." Since this nickname resurfaced while he was relying on negotiation and diplomacy over force to deal with Panamanian dictator General Manuel Antonio Noriega, Bush's decision to invade Panama City is used as a case study. Specifically, the central question is whether the president's interpretations of masculinity and leadership influenced his decisions in 1989. Or, did conventional beliefs that legitimate

¹ Tim O'Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone; Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (New York: Broadway Books, 1975), 38.

² The use of gender, particularly masculinity, in the history of American foreign relations is burgeoning. Kristin Hoganson offers a thorough overview in "What's Gender Got to do With It? Gender History as Foreign Relations History," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan, Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 304-322.

³ Quotes taken from, Theodore Roosevelt, "The Manly Virtues and Practical Politics," *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt* (hereafter *WTR*), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 13, 32-33; Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood; How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴ Studies that have highlighted the esteem attributed to these qualities include, Joseph W. Maxwell, "The Keeping Fathers of America," *Family Coordinator* 25 (1976), 388; Scott Coltrane, "Marketing the Marriage 'Solution': Misplaced Simplicity in the Politics of Fatherhood: 2001 Presidential Address to the Pacific Association," *Sociological Perspectives* 44 (2001), 387-418; Harry Christian, *The Making of Anti-Sexist Men* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

political leadership required a forceful nature compel Bush to invade despite his personal beliefs?

To explore if a forceful and aggressive interpretation of masculinity played an integral role in the decision-making process, the following discussion focuses on the political and cultural context of the late 1980s. Particular attention is paid to Bush's opinions regarding leadership and ideal masculine attributes, to references to Bush's conduct in foreign affairs from certain media sources, and to the impact of their opinions on policy formulation. This allows the discussion to reveal that rather than adhering to conventional beliefs regarding a strong masculine nature and presidential leadership, Bush followed his personal ideals by taking a "cautious" approach that emphasized "negotiation" and "cooperation."⁵ But, when he adhered to those ideals during the first year of his presidency, the media questioned his legitimacy by referring to him as a "wimp." It was not until he adopted a forceful and resolute persona by invading Panama that he could confirm his leadership capabilities. Evidently, an American public associated political authority with an aggressive masculine nature. These beliefs gave social perceptions of masculinity the ability to influence Bush's Panamanian policies in the late 1980s.

Throughout many of President George H.W. Bush's speeches and writings it is apparent that he embraced a conception of masculinity and leadership that was not strongly associated with martial masculinity. Yet, despite the strength of his personal values, he did admire certain "virtues of the soldier." Among them was strength and courage, as Bush considered "the safety of American citizens" a president's most important obligation.⁶ He also agreed that a strong work ethic was essential, as he told Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney about the Report on the Defense Management Review:

"Successful implementation of the Report's recommendations will be a major step [toward] fulfilling our promise to the American people to maintain our nation's strength and bring greater efficiency to the government."⁷

Following this, Bush held a politician's vigorous sense of commitment in high regard. This opinion was revealed when he thanked his predecessor Ronald Regan, for his efforts in combating domestic drug abuse.⁸ Beyond the office of the president, the esteem Bush accorded to these qualities can be seen when he described nominees for various political appointments. For instance, when he announced Edward S.

⁵ David Mervin argued that Bush took a "cautious" approach to foreign affairs and did not firmly present his own beliefs and convictions policy, which led the media to perceive him as a "wimp." Likewise, sociologist Michael Kimmel argued that Bush was perceived as a "timid" President until he confirmed his willingness to use force, thus confirming his manhood, with the invasion of Panama. Several of Bush's diary entries and letters substantiate these arguments since he expressed that he preferred diplomacy and co-operation, David Mervin, *George Bush and the Guardianship Presidency* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 2, 27, 33-35; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 296-297; George Bush, *All the Best, George Bush; My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 233, 369, 343.

⁶ George Bush, "Exchange with Reporters on the Attempted Overthrow of General Manuel Noriega of Panama" *Public Papers of the Presidents; George H.W. Bush* (hereafter *PPB*), (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1990), 1300.

⁷ Bush, "Letter to Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney on the Report on the Defense Management Review," *PPB*, 929. Bush also discussed the importance of a good work ethic in a news conference concerning the war on drugs: "the answer is not to respond to criticism...but it is to do better... [and]...I want to see us do better." Bush, "The President's News Conference," *PPB*, 1031.

⁸ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the National Drug Control Strategy," *PPB*, 1136. Bush also acknowledged Regan's commitment during an address given on National POW/MIA Recognition Day, Bush, "Remarks on Signing the National POW/MIA Recognition Day Proclamation," *PPB*, 1032.

Walker's appointment as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates he relied on Walker's military service in the early 1960s to confirm his capabilities.⁹ Hence, these speeches reveal that Bush did respect certain aspects of martial masculinity, despite his personal belief in negotiation and caution. More importantly, because each of these speeches focuses on past and present politicians, they reveal that Bush did believe that the adoption of such attributes could help to establish legitimate political leadership and authority.

Yet, these speeches also suggest that the current president did not allocate the same significance to martial actions or attributes as such men as Roosevelt had. Bush conveyed this opinion by quickly citing Walker's military credentials at the very end of his speech, presenting Walker as the ideal candidate by emphasizing his education, past diplomatic service, and volunteer experience.¹⁰ Consequently, he indicated that the "hardy virtues... [of] the soldier" did not necessarily confer political legitimacy.

In Bush's discussions or references to masculinity and presidential leadership, he conveyed similar sentiments by emphasizing various qualities that opposed martial masculinity. Within domestic politics, for instance, Bush felt a president could be most effective if he "compromised" with Congress instead of confronting the House over contentious issues.¹¹ In the president's view, co-operation and conciliation were important; acting "macho" or bullying Congress might cause members to feel defensive, thus undermining an effective working relationship. Publicly, he revealed these sentiments in his Inaugural Address when he stated that in order to meet future challenges the Executive and Congress "need[ed] to compromise."¹² Later, in an address concerning drug abuse, Bush reiterated these opinions when he asserted that "teamwork" between the government, the justice system, various social sectors, along with "bipartisan cooperation" was the only way the war could be won.¹³ Similarly, in foreign policy he believed that the best method for protecting American interests overseas was not through strong-arm tactics, but through the use of "diplomacy" and increased "cooperation" between nations.¹⁴ In his diary he wrote, "I want to use our abilities to bring peace, to [maintain] discussions with the Soviet Union, to reduce...the fear of nuclear weapons."¹⁵ In a letter addressed to His Excellency Deng Xiaoping of China, Bush stressed that the U.S. was ready and willing to "cooperate" with the Chinese to improve relations.¹⁶ Finally, it is important to note that Bush did not believe that a politician had to project a "tough" image in order to legitimize their policies. As he noted in a letter to President Reagan after a meeting with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, "I didn't get the feeling he had to prove how tough he was."¹⁷ Yet Bush still considered Gorbachev

⁹ Bush, "Nomination of Edward S. Walker, Jr., to be United States Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates," *PPB*, 1373. Additionally when Peter F. Schabarum was appointed Member of the Advisory Board of the National Air and Space Museum, his service in the Korean War was the last credential cited. Bush, "Appointment of Peter F. Schabarum as a Member of the Advisory Board of the National Air and Space Museum," *PPB*, 1205.

¹⁰ Bush, *PPB*, 1373.

¹¹ Bush, *All the Best*, 404; Mervin, 44-45.

¹² Bush, "Inaugural Address," *PPB*, 1.

¹³ On teamwork, see: Bush, "Address to the Nation on the National Drug Control Strategy," *PPB*, 1136-1137; On cooperation, see: Bush, "Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate Transmitting the national drug Control Strategy Report," *PPB*, 1136.

¹⁴ Mervin, 46; George Bush, Victor Gold, *Looking Forward; An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 204

¹⁵ Bush, *All the Best*, 352; Mervin, 30.

¹⁶ Bush, *All the Best*, 430.

¹⁷ Bush, *All the Best*, 343.

a credible leader who was in command of his government.¹⁸ Likewise within the United States, Bush was not convinced that he had to project a “tough” and “confrontational” image.¹⁹ Instead Bush wanted to create the image of a “kinder, gentler” government that was ready to “listen.”²⁰

Unfortunately, few Americans evaluated Bush according to his perception of leadership and ideal masculine attributes. Within the wider cultural context, most Americans associated authority with “macho” and assertive manhood. Sociologist Michael Kimmel illustrates this association by exploring popular perceptions of ideal leaders that prevailed in 1979. What he finds is that the working class man epitomized masculinity whereas the manhood of highly educated elite men was questionable since their class culture had protected them from the harsh realities of life.²¹ Consequently, the legitimacy of such politicians as Averell Harriman was doubted. As famed author Tom Wolfe once argued, “It seems to me that when it comes to pre-school honks like Averell Harriman...as soon as [he] opens [his] mouth, a bell goes off in the brains of most local-bred New York males: sissy. Here [was a] kid who woulda got *mashed* in the street life.”²²

During the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, women’s participation in the labour market increased significantly.²³ Since these changes challenged conventional beliefs of gender, power and authority, one would expect that such leaders as Harriman or Bush would no longer have to present themselves as aggressive macho men. Yet research suggests that these stereotypes have remained relatively unchanged. For example, a study conducted by psychologist Stephanie Madon at Iowa State University in 1997 asked participants to list the traits commonly associated with women, and both homosexual and heterosexual men. The traits most often associated with women were compassionate, emotional, gentle, sensitive, soft hearted, good listeners, and “touchy-feely.” Homosexual men were described as effeminate, understanding, good listeners, passive, and in strong need of security. Furthermore, each of these attributes was considered a gender role violation. Accordingly, when asked to list the attributes most commonly associated with men, the participants responded that tough language, being “hard-hearted,” unemotional, and participating in “macho” activities such as fighting and hunting typified the American man.²⁴

Thus, it is likely that in the late 1980s members of the public, the media, and political circles felt that

¹⁸ As Bush wrote in his diary, “Gorbachev is amazing in style...he is clearly in command....I’m impressed with the man...” Bush, *All the Best*, 370-1.

¹⁹ As he wrote in his diary, “The handlers want me to be tough now, pick a fight with somebody...maybe they’re right, but this is a hell of a time to start being something I’m not. Let’s just hope the inner strength, conviction and hopefully, honour come through...” Bush, *All the Best*, 369.

²⁰ Regarding the image of a “kinder, gentler” government, see, Bush, *All the Best*, 417; Mervin, 30; Kimmel, 296. Regarding Bush’s desire to create a government that was ready to “listen,” see, Bush, *All the Best*, 357.

²¹ Kimmel, 277.

²² Tom Wolfe quoted in Kimmel, 277; emphasis original to the text.

²³ Between 1970 and 2004, the number of women participating in the labour market rose by 36.9 million, or 117%. By comparison, men’s participation increased by 27.8 million, or 54%. Their entry had a strong impact on certain sectors. For instance, in 1970, only 0.3% of women were employed as engineer/mathematician/scientist/computer specialist, in 1986 that number had risen to 1.7%, while men’s rates declined from 7.0% to 6.6%. Similarly during the same period, the percentage of women employed in managerial positions rose from 1.4% in 1970 to 9.3% in 1986, and men’s rose from 12.9% to 18.7%. It is also interesting to note that women’s voluntary withdrawal from the labour market decreased from 55.1% in 1970 to 27.3%. Michael Heylin, “Evolving Anatomy of the U.S. Labor Force,” *Chemical and Engineering News* 83 (2005): 17-20; Catherine J. Weinberger, “Is Teaching More Girls More Math the Key to Higher Wages?” in Mary C. King, ed., *Squaring Up: Policy Strategies to Raise Women’s Incomes in the United States* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 240.

the “rough challenges of the Oval Office” required a tough American man.²⁵ Since Bush refused to exorcise his elitist background, and emphasized a “kinder” and “gentler” government that did not rely on strong man tactics, both his manhood and his capabilities as a political leader were questioned.²⁶ Within the media, assertions that Bush did not have the strength or “toughness” required for leadership frequently appeared during his campaign in 1988.²⁷ In many instances, reporters articulated this impression of Bush using cartoon or rhetorical metaphors that played on popular opinions of political power and manhood. One common metaphor was Bush as a woman. Be it a housewife, or cheerleader, or press comments that as vice president he had a “wifely” relationship with President Ronald Reagan, these illustrations and references suggested a lack of manliness in the president elect.²⁸ Other metaphors invoked the persona of “Wee George,” and typically portrayed Bush as physically weak. *The Buffalo News*, for instance, placed Bush in a carnival scene where he attempts to prove his masculine prowess by hitting a hammer and ringing the bell at “regular guy,” the highest level. The scale reads like a list of descriptions against masculinity and political power: “wimp” and “vice president” are included along with “cream puff” and “cry-baby.” Despite Bush’s efforts, he can only reach “nebbish.”²⁹ This impression was reiterated in cartoon depictions of Bush as a hysterical prep-school boy who cries to Reagan when “those other boys” act “rough.”³⁰ *The Atlanta Constitution* relied on the image of Bush as a feeble old man to convey the wimp factor, even after he swept the Southern primaries on “Super Tuesday,” which is referenced in a campaign button on his lapel. Taken together, the media’s use of these metaphors conveyed that Bush either lacked or had misplaced his manliness. Since Americans associated assertive manhood with political power, these portrayals of Bush called his legitimacy as president into question.³¹

Throughout the Bush Campaign, the president-elect and his strategists worked hard to bury the “wimp” factor.³² For instance, Bush solicited advice on how to present a tough and assertive style in candidate debates.³³ To a large extent this reversal in Bush’s image was well received by Americans as he swept

²⁴ Stephanie Madon, “What Do People Believe About Gay Males? A Study of Stereotype Strength and Content,” *Sex Roles* 37 (1997). Via Department of Psychology, Iowa State University, <<http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/madon/>>.

²⁵ Margaret Warner documented the belief amongst political elite that a presidential candidate must be tough, confrontational, and self confident in order to handle the challenges of the Oval Office. Margaret Garrard Warner, “Bush Battles the ‘Wimp Factor’” *Newsweek* (1987), 31, 36.

²⁶ Mervin, 30, 46; In 1974 and 1980, Ford and Regan did not appoint Bush Vice President because they doubted his ability to handle the “rough challenges” of the Oval Office, Ford quoted in Warner, 36, with respect to both Administrations’ uncertainties, see, Warner, 36. With respect to uncertainty about Bush’s manhood, see, Warner, “Wimp Factor,” *Newsweek* 36.

²⁷ Warner, 29.

²⁸ Janice Edwards, *Political Cartoons in the 1988 Presidential Campaign, Image, Metaphor, and Narrative* (New York: Garland Publishing Limited, 1997), 100; In his diary, Bush expressed frustration with the continued “jokes” in the media about the Vice President, Bush, *All the Best*, 337.

²⁹ Edwards, *Political Cartoons in the 1988 Presidential Campaign*, 100-102.

³⁰ Mervin, 27; Edwards, 91; Kimmel, 286; Bush, *All the Best* 313, 340.

³¹ Edwards, 100-102.

³² Bush, *All the Best* 368, 397-398; Kimmel, 296.

³³ John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of George Bush*, (Kansas, Wisconsin: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 28-31; Bush, *All the Best*, 375-377; Kimmel, 296.

every state except Washington and won the Republican Party nomination.³⁴ It seemed that the “wimp” factor had been subverted. However, it resurfaced not long after Bush assumed office. For the most part, this was due to Washington’s problematic ties to General Manuel Noriega.³⁵ Previously an informant for the Central Intelligence Agency, Noriega became a political liability and an embarrassment for the Reagan Administration in the mid 1980’s after a series of events. The first was the Iran-Contra Scandal, when it was discovered that Reagan had used him to conduit arms to the Contras after Congress had banned the direct provision of U.S. arms. Following this, in 1985 Panamanian human rights activist Hugo Spadafora was murdered, almost certainly on the orders of Noriega. When Panamanian President Barletta ordered an investigation, he was forced from power. Once Congress emphasized combating domestic drug abuse and Noriega was indicted on drug charges in February of 1988, he responded to the charges by staging a coup and seizing effective control of the government.³⁶

Even though unease about a government in another country was a matter of concern for the executive, the Senate and the media began forcefully pushing the question of Panama. The murder of Spadafora, the removal of Barletta, and Noriega’s subsequent take over of the government presented challenges to America’s ability to wield authority over a traditional protectorate.³⁷ Thus Noriega was challenging America’s perception of its manhood.³⁸ Not surprisingly, public and political opinion began to call for action. Such calls increased after journalist Seymour Hersh published a series of articles in the *New York Times* documenting the General’s illicit drug ties and Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina conducted Senate hearings to investigate Noriega’s actions.³⁹

For the newly elected Bush Administration, the increased anxiety over Noriega and the wimp allegations that plagued the president’s image made the General’s removal the defining moment of the Bush Administration and its test of credibility.⁴⁰ Bush took a very tough line on Noriega in public asserting that “there must be no misunderstanding...Noriega must go.”⁴¹ The president’s aggressive campaign against Noriega became a means for Bush to rebut the “wimp” allegations and confirm his legitimacy as a forceful, masculine leader.⁴²

Despite such potential political benefits, the Administration wavered over how to handle Noriega.

³⁴ Greene, 31, 39, 40. It is important to note that later in the campaign the media also described Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis’ as “wimpy” after several ill-fated photo opportunities. This indicates the power of gender perceptions within politics and the strength of American’s belief that legitimate leadership was associated with a forceful character. Kimmel, 297.

³⁵ It is interesting to note that various scholars have also found that the media considered Bush a wimp within domestic politics. George C. Edwards, “Public Opinion Polls and the Bush Presidency,” in *Honour and Loyalty; Inside the Politics of the George H.W. Bush White House*, ed. Leslie D. Feldman, Rosanna Perotti, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 391.

³⁶ Steven Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration, In Search of a New World Order* (London: Cassell, 1999), 50.

³⁷ Richard Collin, “Symbiosis versus Hegemony: New Directions in the Foreign Relations Historiography of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft” in *Paths to Power; The Historiography of American Foreign Relations to 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 124.

³⁸ Greene, *The Presidency of George Bush*, 104.

³⁹ Rebecca L. Grant, *Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1990), 12-13.

⁴⁰ Stephen Kurkjian, “Key Moment for President,” *Boston Globe*, May 15 1989.

⁴¹ Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration* 50.

⁴² Hurst, 50.

Bush and his officials hoped that Panamanian presidential elections scheduled for May would remove him from office. Since it was likely that Noriega would steal the elections, the Administration increased diplomatic pressure on the General in three ways. First, the Administration persuaded Congress to covertly channel \$10 million to the opposition party. Second, it encouraged international observers to oversee the elections to prevent electoral fraud. Third, Bush supplemented these efforts with several speeches that drew attention to the upcoming elections.⁴³ In spite of their efforts, the elections did not remove Noriega from power; instead, the General nullified the election. Bush responded by demanding that Noriega respect the people of Panama, and step down after being voted out of office by a margin of three to one.⁴⁴ Unfortunately for the Administration, these demands were not enough. This led such reporters as Stephen Kurkjian to question whether the Bush administration was capable of dealing with such a strong and resolute character as Noriega. These doubts are reflected in his descriptions of Noriega's defiant struts, and "the depressing picture painted by Bush" as he explained his intended policy to reporters and to the American public who were both used to "the image of an all powerful U.S. president."⁴⁵ Consequently, the wimp allegations resurfaced; as reporter David Wilson commented that Bush was "at risk of wimphood" without decisive action against the dictator.⁴⁶ The media's uncertainty over Bush's cautious approach to removing Noriega demonstrated that judgements of the president were based on the notion that an ideal leader had to espouse aggressive, manly policies. Therefore, public opinion would not accord legitimacy to a president who did not assume a forceful character.

Between May and October, U.S.-Panamanian relations did not change. Various economic sanctions were used to increase pressure on Noriega to leave, yet the dictator remained in power. In October the Bush Administration was afforded an opportunity to achieve its objective. Rebellious officers of the Panamanian Defence Force (PDF) carried out a coup attempt on the third of October.⁴⁷ Unfortunately for the Bush Administration, the coup was a complete disaster.⁴⁸ The PDF officers who managed to take Noriega hostage did not know what to do with him. They refused to hand him over to the U.S. yet would not kill him. As a result, forces loyal to Noriega had the opportunity to overtake the rebel officers.⁴⁹

Immediately following the coup attempt, there was a great deal of contention within Congress over the extent of America's involvement. The coup had presented the Administration with an opportunity to remove Noriega from office.⁵⁰ However, the U.S. had not gotten involved.⁵¹ The critics were quick to charge that the president "blew it."⁵² An opportunity to remove the "thorn" from America's side had ap-

⁴³ Hurst, 50; Bush, "Remarks to the Council of the Americas," *PPB*, 504-507; "Remarks and a Questions and Answer Session with Reporters Following a Luncheon with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada," *PPB*, 516.

⁴⁴ Bush, "Interview with Members of the White House Press Corps," *PPB*, 533.

⁴⁵ Stephen Kurkjian, "Bush's Few Options Against Foreign Foes," *Boston Globe*, August 16, 1989.

⁴⁶ David Wilson, "Bush on Noriega," *Boston Globe*, May 17, 1989.

⁴⁷ Hurst, 50.

⁴⁸ Hurst, 51.

⁴⁹ Hurst, 51.

⁵⁰ Hurst, 51.

⁵¹ Bush made this clear when he asserted that rumors concerning American involvement were "not true." Bush, "Exchange with Reporters on the Attempted Overthrow of General Manuel Noreiga of Panama," *PPB*, 1300.

⁵² Bush, "Exchange with Reporters Following the President's Hand Surgery," *PPB*, 1315.

peared, yet the president did nothing when “push came to shove.”⁵³ Since Bush had been explicit that Noriega would be removed from power, the fact that the president refrained from either directly or indirectly participating in the coup was considered inconsistent and irresponsible.⁵⁴ This cast doubt on Bush’s legitimacy as president. As a result, members of Congress began to lament that America had lost its will to act and that it would take more than “mumbling” to remove Noriega.⁵⁵ Reporter David Nyhan echoed their concerns when he wrote: “so why did my opponent refuse to put his name behind a law to protect our sacred flag? What kind of politician runs from Old Glory? We’re tired of mealy-mouthed excuses. George Bush had the chance -- and flinched”⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, the perception that Bush was a “wimp” resurfaced, particularly after Noriega publicly challenged American authority when he bragged about his escape.⁵⁷ As Representative Dave McCurdy was quoted, “yesterday, Jimmy Charter looked like a man of resolve. There’s a resurgence of the Wimp factor.”⁵⁸ From these comments, it is evident that the Congress and media were assessing Bush based on masculine traits of an unyielding attitude and aggressive displays of power. Therefore, the doubt over Bush’s courage, his unwillingness to use force, and his “wimpiness,” brought his manhood and his legitimacy as president into question.

Instead of immediately modifying his public image to undermine these allegations, as he and his campaign strategists had done in 1988, Bush asserted that he would not follow the example of the “macho guy” and send American troops into battle with a “carte blanche” on the use of force.⁵⁹ Bush did not value the opinion of his critics since he felt that they were “functioning on the perception” that America must be militant and aggressive if it was going to retain its authority.⁶⁰ It is important to note that Bush explicitly perceived strong displays of American power in gendered terms, yet did so in a different way. To Bush, a strong display of force did not necessarily accord politicians added legitimacy. Instead the use of overwhelming power signified an irresponsible and immature politician, a boy instead of a man. What Bush considered to be ideal leadership did not include the adoption of masculine characteristics and displays of forceful action, but prudence and caution.⁶¹ However, these were two traits that the media and Congress did not associate with American manhood or political legitimacy.

The events throughout November and December were significant because they demonstrated that the adoption of a forceful nature was necessary to wield political authority. Following the failed coup attempt and criticisms in the media, the Administration had to confirm its legitimacy. With the resurgence of the “wimp” factor and the continued calls by “macho guys” like Representative McCurdy for a display of

⁵³ With respect to Noreiga being a thorn in America’s side and the comment that Bush did nothing when “push came to shove, please see: Bush, “Joint News Conference Following Discussions with French President Mitterrand in St. Martin, French West Indies,” *PPB*, 1711.

⁵⁴ With respect to consistency, please see: Bush, “The President’s News Conference,” *PPB*, 1335-8.

⁵⁵ *Congressional Record*, January 1989 to January 1990, Index L-Z, 24704, October 16, 27665, October 31, 1989, volume 135, part 23.

⁵⁶ David Nyhan, “Bush’s Ratings Tremor,” *Boston Globe*, October 17 1989.

⁵⁷ Greene, 104.

⁵⁸ Representative Dave McCurdy quoted in Hurst, 53.

⁵⁹ Bush, “Interview with Latin American Journalists,” *PPB*, 1393-1394.

⁶⁰ Bush, “Interview with Latin American Journalists,” *PPB*, 1393-1394.

⁶¹ On prudence, see, Bush, “Interview with Gerald Boyd of the New York Times and Katherine Lewis of the Houston Post,” *PPB*, 15; idem, “Interview with Latin American Journalists,” *PPB*, 1393-1394. On caution see: Greene, 34.

American power, the available options were limited. Therefore, it was more likely that the use of military force had become a question of when.⁶² From the time Bush entered the presidential race he had committed himself to the removal of Noriega. He had also been perceived as a wimp in many political circles and in the media. The manner in which the Administration responded to the coup and the failure of every attempt by the Administration to remove Noriega did not help undermine the wimp factor or confirm his legitimacy. Therefore it is more likely that the murder of one marine, the torture of another and the threat of sexual violence against his wife in mid-December was the catalyst for the massive invasion, not the actual cause as cited by the president.⁶³ As one senior member of the Administration admitted after the operation, “we suspected that the president felt after the coup that sooner or later we would have to do this.”⁶⁴ Bush indicated how he felt when he admitted, “I’ve been frustrated that he’s been in power for so long, incredibly frustrated.”⁶⁵

The murder of one marine, the torture of another and the possible rape did not threaten American interests in the Canal Zone. Therefore, it is difficult to argue that the Operation was launched only in the interest of national security.⁶⁶ Instead, Bush launched the invasion because he was forced to present his foreign policy as conducive to manhood in order to prove his legitimacy as president. To that extent the Operation was a success, since it “solidified” Bush’s “political identity” and dispelled the image of a passive and weak president.⁶⁷ As political analysts Jack Germond and Jules Witcover and Kimmel asserted: “no one [could] make the mistake of taking President Bush lightly again,” since he was at last a “macho man.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, after the invasion Bush’s approval rating reached 80 percent, the second highest Gallup Poll rating for a president since the Second World War.⁶⁹ Therefore, the public’s reactions to the invasion demonstrated that an aggressive display of power, in a “macho guy” style, confirmed Bush’s legitimacy and ability as president. This made it apparent that the public used perceptions of masculinity and power to assess the legitimacy of a political leader. Furthermore, it illustrated that Americans continued to associate political power with belligerent masculinity. The power of this perception was demonstrated by the actions Bush took to reverse the image he presented to voters during the campaign, his work to subvert the “wimp” factor, and the decision to protect American interests in a manner befitting of the “macho guy” ideal. Therefore, it was evident that Americans continued to believe that a forceful nature associated with masculinity was necessary to wield political authority. The political pressure to adopt manly attributes and to espouse manly policies revealed the power of gender beliefs to affect contempo-

⁶² Hurst, 54.

⁶³ Bush, “The President’s News Conference,” *PPB*, 1733.

⁶⁴ Senior administration official quoted in Hurst, 53.

⁶⁵ Bush quoted in Hurst, 53.

⁶⁶ Several scholars have advanced similar arguments. For example, Steven Hurst argued that it was done to save the Administration’s credibility. The author does so without reference to gender. Hurst, 50-55; Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson argued that it was an act of imperialism. Tucker, Hendrickson, *Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America’s Purpose*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992).

⁶⁷ Sidney Blumenthal as quoted in Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone State Yankee*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1887), 419.

⁶⁸ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover as quoted in Parmet, *Lone State Yankee*, 419; Kimmel, 297.

⁶⁹ It is also interesting to note that in the wake of the U.S. victory in the Gulf War, Bush’s approval ratings reached 89 percent. After two aggressive displays of American power against a defiant government, Bush’s ratings were highest. Edwards, “Opinion Polls and Bush,” in *Honour and Loyalty*, Feldman et al, 387; Hurst, 55.

rary American foreign policy.

Having reconsidered the invasion of Panama in 1989 using gender, it is worth returning to this article's original question- how did convictions regarding masculinity influence the decisions made by President George H.W. Bush? Did he follow his own conception, one that emphasized co-operation? Or did popular associations between political authority and aggressive manhood have a greater impact on policy? After an examination of official and unofficial documents, editorial cartoons, and various media sources, it was ascertained that during the late 1980s Americans believed that a forceful and masculine nature was required to wield political authority. Thus, when George Bush emphasized co-operation and peace through diplomacy so to present the image of a "kinder" and "gentler" government, his legitimacy as president was called into question.⁷⁰ It was only after Bush shed this image by invading Panama in a manner fitting the "macho ideal" that his legitimacy as President was confirmed.⁷¹ These findings illustrate that Bush's personal ideals affected policy less than conventional perceptions of an aggressive masculine nature and presidential credibility. Hence, in the late 1980s American presidential politics, especially foreign policy, were influenced by social perceptions of masculinity.

Furthermore, these findings are significant as they contribute to the ongoing project of moving the study of American foreign relations away from explanations based only on economic and security concerns, and toward more multifaceted understandings. This was accomplished by illustrating how personal opinions and cultural attitudes about gender affected foreign policy in the 1980s. A gendered approach is important as officials do not operate in isolation; instead, as this article demonstrates, they are ordinary Americans whose roles have been socially constructed. They complete their tasks using conceptual frameworks, also shaped by society. Since gender values comprise cultural conventions, greater emphasis should be placed on how these values influence foreign policy. Furthermore, since perceptions of masculinity and power still dominate the political world and have a substantial impact on how policy is formulated, scholars should not neglect gendered politics. Instead, these values must be examined as they are an important tool for attaining a more nuanced and complex understanding of contemporary U.S. foreign policy.⁷²

⁷⁰ Regarding the image of a "kinder, gentler" government, see, *Bush, All the Best*, 417; Mervin, 30; Kimmel, 296. Regarding the emphasis that Bush placed on cooperation and diplomacy, see, Bush, "Address to the Nation on the National Drug Control Strategy," *PPB*, 1136-1137; idem, "Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate Transmitting the National Drug Control Strategy Report," *PPB*, 1136; idem, *All the Best*, 352, 430; Mervin, 46; Bush, Gold, *Looking Forward*, 204.

⁷¹ Bush, "Interview with Latin American Journalists," *PPB*, 1393-1394.

⁷² There are several people that I would like to thank for their help in researching and writing this article: Dr. Gilbert Winham, Dr. Sarah-Jane Corke, Sara Guirguis, Nathan Nickerson, Mark Janson, and Alban Steffler. Finally I would like to thank my anonymous reviewer for their suggestions. They proved to be both helpful and insightful. I accept full responsibility for any remaining errors.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bush, George, and Victor Gold. *Looking Forward; An Autobiography*. New York: Doubleday, 1987.
- . *All the Best, George Bush; My Life in Letters and Other Writings*. New York: Scribner, 1999.
- . “Exchange with Reporters on the Attempted Overthrow of General Manuel Noriega of Panama.” *Public Papers of the Presidents; George H.W. Bush*. Washington: United States Printing Office, 1990.
- Christian, Harry. *The Making of Anti-Sexist Men*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Collin, Richard. “Symbiosis versus Hegemony: New Directions in the Foreign Relations Historiography of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft.” In *Paths to Power; The Historiography of American Foreign Relations to 1941*, edited by Michael J. Hogan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Coltrane, Scott. “Marketing the Marriage ‘Solution’; Misplaced Simplicity in the Politics of Fatherhood: 2001 Presidential Address to the Pacific Association.” *Sociological Perspectives* 44 (2001): 387-418.
- Congressional Record*. January 1989 to January 1990, Index L-Z, 24704, October 16, 27665, October 31, 1989, vol. 135, part 23.
- Edwards, George C. “Public Opinion Polls and the Bush Presidency.” In *Honour and Loyalty; Inside the Politics of the George H.W. Bush White House*, edited by Leslie D. Feldman, Rosanna Perotti. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Edwards, Janice. *Political Cartoons in the 1988 Presidential Campaign, Image, Metaphor, and Narrative*. New York: Garland Publishing Limited, 1997.
- Grant, Rebecca L. *Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process*. Santa Monica: RAND, 1990.
- Greene, John Robert. *The Presidency of George Bush*. Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 1997.
- Hendrickson, David, C and Robert W. Tucker. *Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America's Purpose*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992.
- Heylin, Michael. “Evolving Anatomy of the U.S. Labor Force.” *Chemical and Engineering News* 83 (2005): 16-29.
- Hoganson, Kristin. *Fighting for American Manhood; How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- . “What’s Gender Got to do With It? Gender History as Foreign Relations History.” In Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Hurst, Steven. *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration, In Search of a New World Order*. London: Cassell, 1999.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.

Kurkjian, Stephen. "Key Moment for President." *Boston Globe*, May 15 1989.

———. "Bush's Few Options Against Foreign Foes." *Boston Globe*, August 16 1989.

Madon, Stephanie. "What Do People Believe About Gay Males? A Study of Stereotype Strength and Content." *Sex Roles* 37 (1997). Via Department of Psychology, Iowa State University, <<http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/madon/>>.

Maxwell, Joseph W. "The Keeping Fathers of America." *Family Coordinator* 25 (1976): 387-392.

Mervin, David. *George Bush and the Guardianship Presidency*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Nyhan, David. "Bush's Ratings Tremor." *Boston Globe*, October 17, 1989.

O'Brien, Tim. *If I Die in a Combat Zone; Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*. New York: Broadway Books, 1975.

Parnet, Herbert S. *George Bush: The Life of a Lone State Yankee*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.

Warner, Margaret Garrard. "Bush Battles the 'Wimp Factor.'" *Newsweek*, 1987.

Weinberger, Catherine J. "Is Teaching More Girls More Math the Key to Higher Wages?" In *Squaring Up; Policy Strategies to Raise Women's Incomes in the United States*, edited by Mary C. King. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001.

Wilson, David. "Bush on Noriega." *Boston Globe*, May 17, 1989.